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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 002276

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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN

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TAGS: KDEM NU PGOV PHUM PINR PREL

SUBJECT: NUNCIO: "AN ORTEGA VICTORY IS POSSIBLE BUT NOT PROBABLE"

REF: A. VATICAN 0213

1B. MANAGUA 1370
1C. 2005 MANAGUA 2738

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

11. (C) Nuncio Jean Paul Gobel believes that the victory of Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) presidential candidate Daniel Ortega is "possible but not probable." However, he warned Ambassador and polcouns on October 12 that popular support for the FSLN has grown in some areas of the country, including traditionally Conservative Granada, where "entire barrios" now support the FSLN. He observed that while deceased Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS) candidate Herty Lewites had attracted many traditional FSLN voters, Lewites' successor Edmundo Jarquin appeals more to intellectuals than to common folk, many of whom may migrate back to the FSLN.

12. (C) Gobel mentioned that he had not received notice from the Vatican on Ambassador Rooney's October 10 meeting with the Holy See's Undersecretary for Relations with States, Monsignor Pietro Parolin (Ref. A), concerning Cardinal Obando y Bravo's political activities, explaining that this type of report would be sent to him via diplomatic pouch -- a slow process. The Ambassador noted that Obando's pro-FSLN stance is troubling from both political and religious perspectives and signals a disturbing shift from Obando's anti-Sandinista views in the 1980s. Gobel reported that in June the Bishops' Conference agreed to issue a pastoral letter, released on August 15 and calling on Nicaraguans to vote and consider the past records of the candidates -- an indirect reference to Daniel Ortega. Gobel suggested that Church leaders will continue to refer to the letter before the November 5 elections, but he doubts that the Church will issue an additional, more direct communique, as doing so would require a unanimous vote.

13. (C) Referring to the Church's traditional reluctance to chastise its leadership, Gobel doubted that the Vatican will call in Obando y Bravo. However, he noted that Parolin "is young and a Salesian, who might see things differently." Gobel added that Parolin is also a classmate of the Cardenal of Tegucigalpa, who met with Gobel in Managua two weeks ago. The Cardenal assured Gobel that he would raise the issue of Obando with Parolin.

14. (C) To the Ambassador's query over the participation of the Church in electoral observation via NGO Etica y Transparencia -- specifically Archbishop Leopold Brenes' and Bishop Hombach's (Granada) interests in the matter -- Gobel

replied that he opposes the participation of the Church as an institution, but favors the involvement of individual Catholics. (NOTE: Gobel left the clear impression that he in fact dissuaded the Archbishop from mounting a separate Church observation mission.) He also opined that the Church's open leadership of a recent pro-life, anti-abortion march in Managua that ended with the presentation of a document to National Assembly lawmakers, had crossed the line, in his view, between the Church's role and politics.

¶5. (C) The Nuncio also commented on the sorry state of the Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC), observing that PLC leader Arnoldo Aleman "is not helping Rizo and appears to want him to lose." Troubled by the ego-centric nature of Nicaraguan politics, Gobel added that even PLC National Assembly candidates do not care if Rizo wins, recounting his recent meeting with PLC National Assembly candidate Francisco Aguirre Sacasa, who unabashedly informed him that neither Montealegre nor Rizo is a shoe-in. However, regardless of the election outcome, Aguirre Sacasa was confident that he will gain a seat in the Assembly (he is second on the PLC slate), which was all that appeared to matter to the ex-Foreign Minister.

TRIVELLI